1: McGee E-5 (1894-1895)1898 NU31 Seri NU31

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RECENTLY OCCUPIED RANCHERIA, TIBURON ISLAND

TYPICAL HOUSE INTERIOR, TIBURON ISLAND

1: McGee E-5 (1894-1895)1898 NU31 Seri NU31

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HOUSE FRAMEWORK, TIBURON ISLAND

HOUSE COVERING, TIBURON ISLAND

1: McGee E-5 (1894-1895)1898 NU31 Smi. NU31

and larger bones, smoked up the blood stains, and buried the few remains in cactus thickets, impenetrable save by their own hardy limbs and bodies. Nor did any of the tribe except the two restrained neophytes ever really enter the collective life of the patriarchal group headed by Don Pascual; they attended no industrial or social or churchly function save in response to reminder and solicitation; they craved the white man's medicines in slight disorders, but rejected them in extremis; and the dying or dead were spirited away to be inhumed and mourned, according to their wont, in their harsh but beloved motherland.

During this period of mutual toleration the Seri were so deeply influenced by the white contact that, for probably the only time in their history, they voluntarily allowed an alien free entry into their territory; and Don Pascual explored the coast of Bahía Kino, projected a port, and even visited Isla Tiburon twice or thrice. In one of these visits he was ferried over Boca Infierno on a balsa, but, finding himself unable to keep pace with the swift-footed Seri on their hilly pathways, he returned for his saddle mule; halfway across, the poor animal swimming behind the balsa suddenly plunged and struggled, and, on landing, hobbled out on three legs—the fourth having being snapped by a shark. Warned by this incident, Don Pascual abandoned a half-formed plan of stocking the island, and afterward brought up a small vessel from Guaymas in which he carried across a dozen caballeros (including Don Ygnacio Lozania, who had visited the island with the Andrade expedition); and this party examined the southeastern quarter of the island, watering two or three times at Tinaja Anita, and pushing as far westward as Arroyo Carrizal. On this trip he studied the Seri house-building, and was the first to note the large use of turtle-shells and sponges in the process.[1]

About the middle fifties it became apparent that the Seri were dividing into a parasitical portion clustered about the rancho (as their forbears gathered about Populo and Pueblo Seri long before), and a more independent faction clinging to their rugged ranges and gale-swept fishing grounds; and it became evident, too, that the thievery of the dependent faction would soon ruin the rancho if not checked, or at least greatly diminished. Accordingly the passive policy was modified by introducing a more active police service. At first the penalties for theft and misdemeanors were light, and the system promised well—especially as even a slight punishment was equivalent to banishment, the criminal fleeing to Tiburon on his escape or immediately after the crime; yet the experience of a year or two proved that the escaped parasites seldom resumed the hard customs of their tribal life, but generally returned to the borderland and there preyed on the wandering stock from the rancho. Finally, driven to extremity, and supported

[1] Typical Seri jacales, as described by Don Pascual in 1895, were observed on Tiburon by the 1898 expedition, as shown by the photographs reproduced in plates VII, VIII, and IX.

1: McGee E-5 (1894-1895)1898 NU31 Seri NU31

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SPONGE USED FOR HOUSE COVERING, TIBURON ISLAND

Cp. 112 A]

1: McGee E-5 (1894-1895)1898 NU31 Seri NU31

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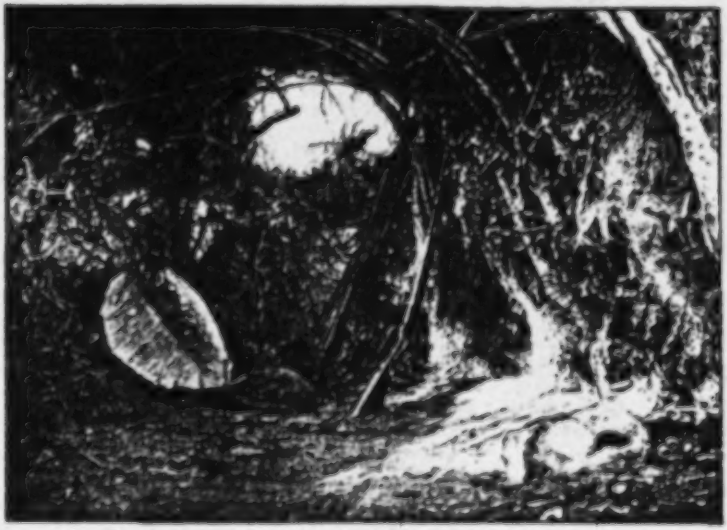
HOUSE SKELETON, TIBURON ISLAND



INTERIOR HOUSE STRUCTURE, TIBURON ISLAND

1: McGee E-5 (1894-1895)1898 NU31 Seri NU31

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354
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SEVENTEENTH ANNUAL REPORT PL. X

BUREAU OF AMERICAN ETHNOLOGY

TYPICAL SERI HOUSE ON THE FRONTIER

[FACING P. 117]

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516

OCCUPIED RANCHERIA ON THE FRONTIER

1: McGee E-5 (1894-1895)1898 NU31 Seri NU31

[FACING P. 119]

1: McGee E-5 (1894-1895)1898 NU31 Seri NU31

Naturally the conditions at Costa Rica were unfavorable to the study of native ideas concerning apparel. The women and some of the children were arrayed chiefly in cast-off habiliments of the rancheras or in nondescript rags, while the men either aped Mexican fashions, like Mashém, or shamefacedly sweltered under the unaccustomed burden of tatterdemalion gear; yet there was a meaningful absence of that desire for finery so prominent among primitive peoples—a fact quite as eloquent in itself as the absence of bracelets and bangles, tassels and trappings. It is probable that the shamans and mystery-bedged crones in the depths of Seriland enhance their influence by the aid of symbolic paraphernalia (indeed, some inkling of such customs is found in the meager records of earlier visitors);[1] yet the conspicuous feature of Seri costumery is the dearth of decorative devices.

FIG. 13.—Necklace of wooden beads.

The habitations of the tribe are the simplest of jacales—mere bowers, affording partial protection from sun and wind, but not designed to shed rain or bar cold. Half a dozen of these were examined at Costa Rica in 1894 and probably a hundred more, in various stages of habitability, in Seriland proper in 1895, yet not the slightest trace of decoration was observed—the structures are plainly and barrenly utilitarian in every feature. The same may be said of the balsas in which the Seri navigate their stormy waters; for the peculiarly graceful curves of the craft evidently stand for nothing more than the mechanical solution of a complex problem in balanced forces, wrought out through the experience of generations, while the simple reed bundles are absolutely devoid of paint, of superfluous cord, of fetishistic appendages or markings, of tritons, nereids, or other votive symbols at bow or stern, and of industrially superfluous features or attachments in general—indeed, the only appendages discovered were one or two simple wooden marlinspikes (shown in figure 26), thrust among the reeds to be at hand in case of need for repairs.

Among the utensils employed in the primitive householdry of the Seri the most conspicuous and at the same time the most essential is the olla, or water-jar. Its technical features are described elsewhere; but it may here be noted that the olla is the central artifact about which the very

[1] Hardy noted the use of "a small leathern bag, painted and otherwise ornamented", as a medicine rattle (Travels, p. 282), and also described a wind-symbol and an effigy used for thaumaturgic purposes (ibid., pp. 284, 288).

I: McGee E-5 (1894-1895)1898 NU31 Seri NU31

in which men lived alongshore and adjusted themselves to maritime conditions rather than to terrestrial environments; a stage evidently but barely passed by the Seri, since they still subsist mainly on sea food, still retain their suggestive navigation, and still view their stormy straits and bays as the nucleus and noblest portion of their province. 501

HABITATIONS

Among the Seri, as among primitive folk generally, the habitation reflects local conditions, especially climate and building materials. Now, Serriland is a subtropical yet arid tract, where rain rarely falls, frost seldom forms, and snow is known only as a fleeting mantle on generally distant mountains, so that there is little need for protection from cold and wet; at the same time the district is too desert to yield serviceable building material other than rock, which the lowly folk have not learned to manipulate. Moreover, the tribesmen and their families are perpetual fugitives (their movements being too erratic and aimless to put them in the class of nomads); they are too accustomed to wandering and too unaccustomed to long resting at particular spots to have a home-sense, save for their motherland as a whole; and, just as they rely on their own physical hardihood for preservation against the elements, so they depend on their combined fleetness and prowess for preservation against enemies. Accordingly, the Seri habitation is not a permanent abode, still less a domicile for weaklings or a shrine for household lares and penates, not at all a castle of proprietary sanctity, and least of all a home; it is rather a time-serving lair than a house in ordinary meaning. 182 342

Despite the poverty of the material and the squalor of the structure, certain features of the Seri jacal are notably uniform and conventional. In size and form it recalls the passing "prairie schooner", or covered wagon; it is some 10 or 12 feet long, half as wide measured on the ground, and about 4½ feet high, with one end (the front) open to the full width and height, and the other nearly or quite closed. The conventional structural features comprise the upright bows and horizontal tie-sticks forming the framework. The bows are made of okatilla stems (*Fouquiera splendens*) roughly denuded of their thorns; each is formed by thrusting the butts of two such stems (or more if they are slender) into the ground at the requisite distance apart, bending the tops together into an overlap of a yard or two, and securing them partly by intertwisting, partly by any convenient lashing; and about five or six such bows suffice for a jacal (the appearance of the bows is fairly represented by the ruin shown in plate VII). Next come the tie-sticks, which consist of any convenient material (okatilla stems, cane-stalks, paloblanco branches, mesquite roots, saguaro ribs, etc.), and are lashed to the butts by means of withes, splints, or fiber wisps, at a height of some 4 feet above the ground, or about where the walls merge into the roof. With the placing of these sticks the conventional part 342

1: McGee E-5 (1894-1895)1898 NU31 Seri NU31

of the building process may be said to end; for up to this point the process is a collective one and the materials are essentially uniform, while thereafter the completion of the work depends largely on individual or family caprice, and the materials are selected at random. Moreover, the framework is fairly permanent, usually surviving a number of occupancies extending over months or years, and outlasting an equal number of outer coverings; so that all habitable Seriland is dotted sparsely with jacal skeletons, sometimes retaining fragments of walls or roof, but oftener entirely denuded.

The conversion of the framework into a habitable jacal is effected by piling around and over it any convenient shrubbery, by which it is made a sort of bower; sometimes the conversion is aided by the attachment of additional tie-sticks both above and below the main horizontal pieces, as illustrated in the upper figure of plate IX; sometimes, too, the material of walls and roof is carefully selected and interwoven with such pains as to form a rude thatch, as in the chief jacal at Rada Ballena (the upper figure in plate VI); but more commonly the covering is collected at random and is laid so loosely that it is held in place only by gravity and wind pressure, and may be dislodged by a change of wind. Ordinarily the walls are thicker and denser than the roofs, which are supplemented in time of occupancy by haunches of venison, remnantal quarters of cattle and horses, half-eaten turtles, hides and pelts, as well as bird-skin robes, thrown on the bows partly to keep them out of reach of coyotes and partly to afford shade. Most of the jacales about the old rancheria at Punta Tormenta (abandoned at "The Time of the Big Fish"), which may be regarded as the center of the turtle industry, are irregularly clapboarded with turtle-shells and with sheets of a local sponge, as illustrated in plate VII. This sponge abounds in the bight of Rada Ballena, where at high water it spreads over the silty bottom in a slimy sheet, and at low water with off-shore gales is left by the waters to dry into a light and fairly tenacious mat, which is gathered in sheets for bedding as well as for house making material (a specimen of the sponge—probably *Chalina*—is shown on larger scale in plate VIII). On the frontier the jacales may be modified by the introduction of sawed or riven lumber, as illustrated by some of the structures at Costa Rica (shown in plate XI); but even here there is a strong disposition to adhere to the customary form, and especially to the conventional framework, as indicated by the example in plate X.

While the jacales are not consistently oriented, they reveal a primary preference for facing away from the prevailing wind and toward the nearest sea, with a secondary preference for southern and eastern exposures—the former preference being easily explained, since a gale from the front quickly strips walls and roof and scatters the materials afar. No definite order is observed in the placement of the several jacales in the larger rancherias; apparently the first is located at the choice of the leading elderwoman, and the others are clustered about it at the com-

1: McGee E-5 (1894-1895)1898 NU31 Seri NU31

mon convenience. Usually the several jacales are entirely separate, but at Punta Tormenta, Punta Narragansett, and still more notably at Roda Ballena, individual huts were found either extended to double length or joined obliquely in such wise as to show two fronts (as illustrated in plate VI). The conventional frameworks appear to be common tribal property, at least to the extent that an abandoned skeleton may be preempted by any comer; while the addition of walls and roof appears to afford a prescriptive proprietary right to the elderwoman and family by whom the work is done—though the right seems to hold only during occupancy, or until the temporary covering is dislodged. 361 [342] 423

The jacales are without semblance of furnishing, beyond an occasional ahat and a few loose pebbles used as hupfa; though the nooks behind the bows and tie-sticks sometimes serve as places of concealment for paint-cups, awls, hair bobbins, and other domestic trifles. There is no floor but earth, and this remains in natural condition, except for trampling and wearing into wallows, recalling those of fowls and swine, which afford a rough measure of the periods of occupancy; there is no fireplace—indeed, fires are rarely made in the jacales, nor for that matter frequently anywhere; and there are no fixed places for bedding, water ollas, or other portable possessions, none of which are left behind when the householders are abroad. 352 [342]

Little is known of the actual process of jacal building, especially in Seriland proper; but the observations of Señor Encinas and his vaqueros on the frontier corroborate Mashém's statements that the houses are built by (and belong to) the matrons; that several women customarily cooperate in the collection of the okatilla and erection of the framework; that the only tools used in the processes are hupfa and miscellaneous sticks; and that the placing and fitting of the beams and tie-sticks are accompanied by a chant, usually led by the eldest matron of the group. The same informants support the ready inference from the structure that the shrubbery and other material forming walls and roofs are gathered and placed from time to time by the women occupying the jacales. 342 462 [423]

The Seri building chant is suggestive. Neither Señor Encinas nor Mashém regarded it as religious or even ritualistic, but merely as a work-song designed (in the naive notion of the latter) to make the task lighter; and it seems probable that the local interpretation is correct. If so, the simple chant at once offers rational explanation for its own existence, and opens the way to explanation of the elaborate building rituals of more advanced tribes. The work-song is a common device in many lowly activities, ranging from those of children at play to those of sailors at the windlass, and undoubtedly serves a useful purpose in guiding, coordinating, and concentrating effort; to some extent the vocal accompaniment to the manual or bodily action apparently expresses that normal interrelation of functions manifested by second- 182 342 533

1: McGee E-5 (1894-1895)1898 NU31 Seri NU31

182 ary sense-effects (as when the sense of smell is intensified by exercise
342 of the organs of taste), or, in another direction, by the habit of the
533 youthful penman who shapes his letters by aid of lingual and facial contortion; yet it is a characteristic of primitive life—one doubtless due to the interrelations of psycho-physical functions—to not only employ but to greatly exalt vocal formulas associated with manual activities, so that words, and eventually *the* Word, acquires a mystical or talismanic or sacred significance pervading all lower culture—indeed the savage shaman is unable to work his marvels without mumbled incantations ending in some formulated and well-understood utterance, and his practice persists in the meaningless mummery and culminating "presto" of modern jaggiery. So, viewed in the light of psycho-physical causes and prevalent customs connected with vocal formulas, it would seem probable that the conventional features of the Seri jacales are crystallized in the tribal lore quite as effectually through the associated work-chants as through direct memory of the forms and structures themselves. And the simple runes chanted in unison by Seri matrons engaged in bending and lashing their okatilla house-bows apparently define a nascent stage in the development of the elaborate fiducial house-building ceremonies characteristic of various higher tribes; for the spontaneous vocal accompaniment tends naturally to run into ritual under that law of the development of myth or fable which explains so many of the customs and notions of primitive peoples.[1]

APPARELING

177 Slightly as they have been affected by three centuries of sporadic
291 contact with higher culture, the Seri reveal many marks of acculturation; and the most conspicuous of these are connected with clothing, especially on the frontier, where women and even warriors habitually wear a livery of subserviency in the form of cast-off Caucasian rags (as illustrated in most of the photographs taken at Costa Rica). Even in the depths of Seriland the native fabrics are largely replaced by white men's stuffs, obtained by barter, beggary, and robbery; yet it is easy to distinguish the harlequin veneer of borrowed trappings from the few fixed types of covering that seem characteristic.

The most distinctive piece of apparel is a kilt, extending from waist to knees, worn alike by men and women and the larger children. Aboriginally it was either a birdskin robe or a rectangle of coarse textile fabric, secured at the waist by a hair-cord belt; acculturally it is usually a rectangle of manta (coarse sheeting) or other stuff, preferably cotton or linen but sometimes woolen, fastened either by tucking in the corners or by a belt of cord. Good specimens of the acultural cloth kilt worn by men and larger boys are illustrated in plates XVI

[1] The law of fable in its relation to primitive surgery is formulated in the Sixteenth Ann. Rep. Bur. Am. Eth., 1897, p. 22.

2: Kroeber E-5 (1930) 1931 NU31 Seri NU31

in a paddle blade being cut separately from the shaft, the inventive step from attaching one blade to attaching two blades would have been insignificant—in fact, would be an improvement or variation rather than an invention. The determining factor as to its adoption would probably be the type of navigation as set by water conditions. This is borne out by the distribution of the double paddle, which clings to areas of open salt-water navigation or large bays approximating open water conditions. On rivers and lakes the double paddle would rarely help and often be in the way. In this way the varying association with skin boat, wooden boat, and raft boat seems accounted for. Another factor must be size of the vessel navigated. A broad or high canoe would scarcely allow of alternate paddling on both sides. This may be the cause of the absence of the implement on the Northwest Coast. Whether the Arctic and the California-Seri occurrences are to be historically connected, must probably be left an open question for the present. An answer in favor of connection will evidently depend on the establishment of sufficient other connections to set up a favorable presumption. Until then, the considerations just mentioned make the possibility of independent origin equally plausible.

The single-bladed paddles seen by McGee (p. 219) and myself were two-piece and hafted with nails. McGee is more interested in balsa propulsion by recumbent women with hands, shells, or unhandled blades. That such crude devices were used along shore or in bays often enough to be mentioned, is wholly in line with the conspicuous Seri indifference, slovenliness, and lack of standards; but it is also obvious that real paddles being known and made, these would be the ones taken on open sea voyages of a dozen miles in a region of notably variable winds and currents. The Seri are never fools in practical matters within their compass; and they could not have acquired their indubitable navigating skill by letting their women do most of their paddling with bare hands. The one woman I saw aboard was carried as a passenger across the Infiernillo.

What is typical of Seri habits is that the harpoon shaft is also used for poling, and the harpoon cord as anchor rope, tow-line along shore, sheet rope, and for tying a blanket to a mast and pole to serve as sail; just as the bailer of a leaky skiff is an enamel-ware plate or pot employed at other times for food. The whole harpoon, including the rod-iron point, but dismounted, seems regularly to be taken along on a transport voyage.

The Seri houses I saw opposite Punta San Miguel were like those described by McGee (pp. 221-223): long, narrow, low, and open at least at one end; but they were unroofed. There was also one of double length, and another "joined obliquely"—that is, annexes occupied by younger kin and their families. The lengthwise double house was open through, though constricted at both ends and the

2: Kroeber E-5 (1930)1931 NU31 Seri NU31

middle. Two imperfect wind-breaks of brush, less than a quarter of a circumference in curvature, stood near the camp..

On the subject of textiles and textile clothing (pp. 171, 225-232), McGee is necessarily vague on account of lack of specimens. He says that native kilts, from waist to knee, were either of birdskin or "a rectangle of coarse textile fabric," "woven probably on some primitive device"; that it is practically certain that a long-sleeved, short-bodied shirt or wammus is "of local aboriginal design" and was "made primitively of haircloth or native textiles"; that the probable genetic series of Seri garments was: 1, the pelican-skin robe used as a kilt, 2, the textile shirt, 3, the textile kilt; and that Seri fabrics, according to a Mexican informant, "resemble coarse bagging, and are woven or netted quite plainly."

Human hair cord could be netted, or twined in double weft into basket-like bags or mats; it could hardly be woven into cloth without a loom. The same holds of *ixtle*, agave fiber. Bast of willow, cottonwood, beanstalk, such as was spun and twined, and perhaps woven on a limited scale, by the Colorado river Yuman tribes, was not available to the Seri, though they may have had nearly equally soft substitutes, even in their desert. Cotton they did not have. *Ixtle* is a strong, harsh fiber, excellent for cordage, nets, open-mesh bags, and the like, and still largely used in Mexico for such purposes. It would also serve well for fringe-aprons, for which the Lower Californians used it. A fabric from it would be rough and stiff, giving little warmth, not very satisfactory for a kilt, and quite unserviceable for a fitted garment like a sleeved shirt. Cotton was the prevailing garment material found along the coast by the first Spaniards, north up to the Cahita (Ka'ita, namely Tehueco, Mayo, Yaqui); here *ixtle* became more prevalent though cotton persisted; but the type of garment is not clear.

As to looms, *ixtle* is today woven into carrying bags on a heddled belt-loom by the Nahua-speaking Indians of Sinaloa. The Mayo weave woolen girdles on a similar loom. They also weave woolen blankets on a demountable horizontal loom, the warp passing continuously around the two heavy yarn beams. It is not clear whether this is a hybrid Spanish or a purely native apparatus. The Opata and Pima Bajo loom is not known. The American Pima weave cotton both on a belt-loom and on a staked horizontal loom, but with warps in a single plane.[4] It is difficult to imagine these looms existing among the Seri, except the first mentioned; and this would not yield them much in the way of garments. There is no reason why they should have worn more than the Lower Californian women's fringe-aprons, supplemented perhaps by birdskin blankets and loin covers. They no doubt secured occasional garments from neighboring tribes, as they gladly but irregularly wear those of whites today; and this

[4] Russell, BAE-R, 26:148-153, 1908.

2: Kroeber E-5 (1930)1931 NU31 Seri NU31

114 583 As to the "total absence" (p. 285) of marriage purchase, whereas I found it, such purchase can hardly be believed to have originated wholly within the last 35 years, in view of its wide distribution in native America.

114 614 The whole matter of maternal lineages crystallized into totemic clans with matron rule (pp. 10-11, 167-8, 269 seq.) seems a fantasy. A careful reading of the passages in questions reveals how much McGee has built up on statements which he conscientiously admits to have been slender, probable only, and subject to possible misunderstanding. It must be remembered that in 1894 the matriarchate as original and primitive was still standard anthropological doctrine. At any rate, I got nothing suggesting even matrilineal reckoning in my indirect approaches to the subject, and explicit denials when it was directly presented.

114 342 That house-building may now and then be "accompanied by a chant" (p. 223) is possible, though it seems out of accord with the haphazard and shiftless methods of Seri work and the flimsy irregularity of their homes; but that the chant was "usually led by the eldest matron" seems more matriarchate.

114 174 That the Upanguayma, Guayma, and Tepoka were successively "extruded" (p. 75) would be correct if there were anything to show that the Seri were the parent stock of superior virtue, conservatism, and faithful attachment to their original habitat.

114 601 The statement (p. 11) that "kinship terms are strikingly scanty," made in the face of round-about and imperfect speech communications with the Seri, I cite only as an indication of the degree of McGee's readiness to fall back upon his preconceptions when facts became thin.

114 384 I did not note the absence of superior medial incisor teeth observed by McGee (p. 169) in married women. If a regular practise, its connection with the puberty rite would be a natural inference. But knocking out of teeth is a rare custom in America.

114 224 McGee's statements (pp. 196-7) that it is "undignified, if not wrong" to kill deer other than with the hands, and that jackrabbits are "customarily taken alive to camp," seem over-emphases. That a sense of sport or passing pride, or lack of weapons, now and then leads to such happenings, I do not doubt; but the Seri seem too practical and unromantic to exact rules on the point. I suspect that a youth who insisted on living up to them would soon be considered a vain bore. I may add that I saw a crippled wild duck hobble about the camp on Tiburon for two days, being played with occasionally by the children—without unusual roughness or unkindliness—and that finally it wandered to the water and gradually drifted off without notice being taken.

114 302 614 Face painting is construed by McGee as sematic of totemic line-

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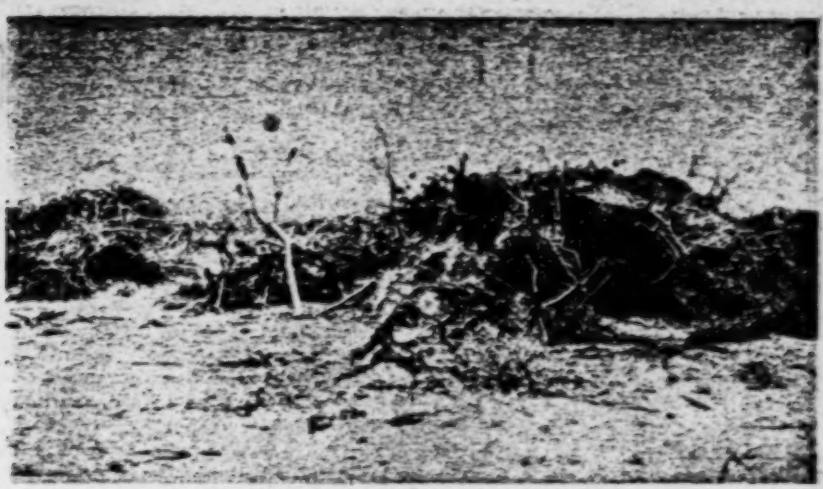

FIG. 3. THE SERI HOME—A BOWER OF BRUSH

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FIG. 4. AN AGUAJE ON TIBURON ISLAND

THE PRINCIPAL WATER SUPPLY AND SOURCE OF THE CARRIZO REED USED IN CONSTRUCTING THE BALSA.

[p.195]

614 hundred Seris at a time. They lived in maternal groups or clans in which the elder females were of great prominence in the management of everyday affairs. When, in
342 the wanderings of a family a new camp was
[462] decided upon, the elder matron usually erected the jacal alone, without the aid of men or boys, gathering the long poles of the ocotillo or the branches of desert trees and fashioning them into an arched framework over which a covering of brush, and often later of turtle shells, served to give protection from the desert sun. After the household was prepared, she took her place within
361 easy reach of the meager and squalid family
592 possessions, and around this nucleus other matrons and their children gathered in the course of a day or two. It was usually three or four days, and sometimes a week, before the brothers and husbands came wandering in from their roving search for food to take their places at the new camp site.

482 From the turtle fishing camps on the chan-
312 nel, the nearest fresh water was at a distance

[p. 196(A)]

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FIG. 6. DOMESTIC SCENE IN A SERI VILLAGE

[p. 197(A)]

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FIG. 7. CARRYING WATER FROM A DESERT AGUAJE

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FIG. 8. STRETCHING AND DRYING THE PELICAN SKIN BOBE

[p. 198(A)]

3: Davis & Dawson E-5 (1922-1940)1945 NU31 Seri NU31

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342
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FIG. 13. PREPARING BASKETRY MATERIAL

THE SPLINTS ARE MADE BY HAND AND MOUTH STRIPPING OF THE BRANCHES OF TOBOSI AND PALO MANSO.

[p. 261(C)]

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FIG. 16. FAMILY DOGS ARE OFTEN MORE NUMEROUS THAN THE PEOPLE
HERE A GROUP OF SEVEN SERIS IN THE VILLAGE NEAR KINO KEEPS TEN OR MORE OF THE MONGREL CANINES.

[p. 264(C)]

3:Davis & Dawson E-5 (1922-1940) 1945
NUBI Seri NUBI

[342]
[415]
[732]

FIG. 17. SERI BLIND MAN
BEING LED BY A BOY. NOTE THE CRUDE SHELTER OF POLES AND BRUSH SERVING AS AN ARMY DWELLING.

231 destitute of nourishment, tough and strong as rawhide; but hope springs eternal in an Indian dog's stomach, and again and again he will search out and mouth the same old pelican bone or fish head, discouraged never. The dogs, beside keeping the camp clean, lick all the cooking utensils when they are not tended, and also are allowed to lick clean the infants after they have performed their natural defecations. A Seri girl was seen placing [312] a small can of water for a dog to drink from, afterward drinking some of the remainder herself and then pouring the rest back into the family five-gallon can.

732 Although the conditions of existence for
734 the Seris had from time immemorial been too precarious to permit of anyone living who was unable by physical disability to hunt or fish to get his meat, there were two or three men, blind or nearly so, whose wives got an uncertain living for them by the hardest struggle (Fig. 17). If a Seri, however, became ill of a disease which the tribe feared, he was often taken into the desert and left with a little food and water, either to get well and return or to perish.

[P. 265(A)]

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342

FIG. 22. SOME SERI WOMEN OF THE VILLAGE NEAR KINO

[p. 268(A)]

h:Davis & Dawson E-5 (1823-1940) 1945
MU33 Semi MU33

621 are four or five hundred people there, more during the peak of the season, and some fifty or more wattle and daub shacks arranged without plan or order, facing at every angle, but all near the beach on which the fishing boats land and are pulled up on shore. Refrigerated trucks carry fifteen to twenty-five tons of fish away daily during the height of the season, mostly the huge endemic totuava (Fig. 21). These great fish are dragged from the boats and lined up on the shore, where the heads are chopped off and the entrails are pulled out and left to be carried away by the tides or consumed by hundreds of
[131] scavenger gulls of the beach. A quarter mile north of Kino is the present-day Seri village where nearly all the Seris now live semi-permanently because of the easy money and
[439] living. They have their own boats, fish a little for profit, and also bake the discarded
[262] fish heads for food. The Seri dwellings are now scarcely inferior to many of the wattle
● 342 and daub shacks of the Mexicans. Indeed, many of the Mexican shacks are built by
[439] Seris in exchange for manta cloth or food.

[p. 268(B)]

3:Davis & Dawson E-5 (1922-1940) 1945
NU31 Seri NU31

342 They are mostly of ocotillo sticks and mesquite branches stood up in the sand, lashed together, and plastered with mud for protection from the wind, but not from the rain (Fig. 22). When the fishing season ends
221 about Holy Week, they all move away to the turtle grounds on Tiburon Island, where they also hunt deer. Then in June and July they go into the desert hills to reap the harvest of cactus fruit, retiring to the lowlands thereafter to harvest the mesquite beans and to await the recurrence of the big fish. In and about Kino they are reasonably well fed and clothed, and were it not for their susceptibility to disease they would be as well-
164 off as many of the Mexicans. Influenza
161 strikes them heavily, however, and pneumonia is common, usually fatal. Their numbers dwindle and their extinction is in sight, yet for a little while these strange people will continue to tread the rocks and thorns of their desert land, a handful of Nature's primitive creatures, through whose veins flows the blood of thoroughbred American aborigines.

[p.268(C)]

5:Dawson N-5 (1940) 1944 NU31 Seri NU31

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1. A basket of cactus meal.

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2. A Seri village on Tiburon Island. Note the large shells of the sea turtle that serves as food.

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3. Making the Seri basket. House is constructed of ocotillo branches and brush.

5:Dawson N-5 (1940) 1944 NU31 Seri NU31

252 of nutritious material which was ground to powder on their stone ahsts, winnowed in shallow baskets and made into a meal or paste.

764 824 The abundant cacti of many species served several other functions in the domestic economy of the Seris. The thorny cholla whose insipid fruits were not fit to eat and whose spines were a constant threat to the unprotected bodies of the Seris, found one use, nevertheless, in the burial procedure. After a body was partly covered with earth in the three foot deep grave, it was densely overlaid with chollas before leveling, to discourage the coyotes from digging for the body.

396 824 The dry skeletons of the giant cacti provided the long, cylindrical poles used in knocking off ripe pitahayas as well as in all other instances in which a straight, slender pole was needed. Since the advent of the open boat in modern times, the cactus skeleton has come in for a new use, for after trituration between stone ahst and hupf, it was found to yield a satisfactory caulking compound when mixed with sea-lion oil.

312 824 The barrel cacti, *Ferocactus Wislizenii* and *F. Coulteri*, though ordinarily abundant on the Sonoran desert are rare in Seriland and practically absent from Isla Tiburon where they may easily have been exterminated by the improvident Seris during their centuries of occupancy on account of their recognized value as water providers on the wastelands over which the Seris so frequently ventured.

342 [132] 824 These Indians found housing no problem, for, living under a climate in which frost is rare and rain infrequent, they found little need for shelters except for protection against the blazing desert sun. Camps that were occupied for more than a day or two, however, usually saw the appearance of a group of crude sun shelters. These were usually made of long, flexible ocotillo branches, *Fouquieria splendens*, stuck in the sand and fashioned into an arched framework over which a more or less complete covering of brush was piled. If, by the sea, a windbreak were desired, the brush top and siding were usually augmented by the addition of several empty turtle shells.

262 824 On the delta plain of the Rio Sonora, the mesquite, *Prosopis juliflora*, grows in remarkable luxuriance, these gnarled, spiny trees forming an almost continuous open forest 20-40 feet high. Its fruit, consisting of small, hard beans borne in slender, woody pods forms a concentrated, starchy food that the Seris found highly nutritious if not appetizing. In late summer when all fresh vegetable food had withered and disappeared, provided the turtle fisheries had not yet attracted them back to their island, they often spent [252] some weeks gathering the beans and grinding them into a meal which was eaten as a watery atole or as a paste mixed with sea-lion oil. The more straggly and thorny cat's claw mesquite, *Acacia Greggii*, and the ironwood, *Olneya tesota*, also yielded woody beans in limited quantity.

[618] 534 In the deeper gorges of the mountains the Seris found *Guaiacum Coulteri* yielding a berry of medicinal properties and also *Jacquinia pungens* which produced a nut, edible when not quite ripe, and forming a favorite rattlebead when dry.

Along sandy washes, particularly on the lower flood plain of the llano grows a low, shrubby weed, *Hymenoclea monogyra*. Although during times of drought it shrinks to stunted tussocks, after periods of heavy rain its flourishing fens produce abundant seeds eaten both by the beasts of the plain and formerly by the Seris.

365 [191] Before the advent of the tin can and the cardboard carton, basketry was an important handicraft among these Indians

[TEXT CONTINUES ON P. 138--ANALYST]

7: Marroquin E-5 (1955) 1957 NU31 Seri NU31

In general, the Seris have a healthy appearance; the most frequent complaints are gastro-intestinal and visual defects due to avitaminosis. It is very possible that given the difficult living conditions resulting from the desert environment, a rigorous selective process among the newborn takes place so that only those who possess exceptional physical qualities survive. This explains why the majority of them retain the physical characteristics described by Hardy more than a century ago: "the Indians of Isla Tiburón are tall, healthy and well built".

In spite of attempts at education, the Seris do not practice the elemental rules of hygiene; their way of life, neglecting this aspect, contributes to increase the unhealthy foci which exist in the places where they have established themselves.

Dwellings.—The Seris retain many vestiges of their nomadic life, among them the hut which serves as their living quarters; many of them are simple provisional arrangements for sheltering themselves from wind and sun, and they bear no relationship to the stability and durability of our dwellings. The Seri hut was made to meet the necessities of a nomadic people who had no reason to spend much time nor work on making a dwelling which would only be used for a season (one, two or at the most three months). Nevertheless, some innovations have been introduced in the last 20 years, so that we must distinguish between two types of houses. The primitive model consists of a series of scrub pine arches interwoven with branches from the same shrub almost totally covered by foliage, tortoise shells, *zacate*, etc., with only a small hole in one of its ends as an entrance (this type of hut is the same that McGee saw in 1894 when the Seris still led a nomadic life).

In the new model more resistent woods are used, like *sahueso*, *torote*, etc., and poles, between which is laid a layer mud. The house is rectangular, without windows; with only one entrance, but always larger than the entrance to the brush hut. Other models would have to be added to these two, due to the incorporation and utilization of tents made in the United States which some U. S. tourists or the Society of Friends have given them. The tent is used as permanent living quarters; or sometimes combined with branches to cover the primitive type huts.

Domestic Animals.—The Seris are very fond of domestic animals like the dog, cat, and finally, the chicken. For all practical purposes these animals live together with the family; they rest on the piles of rags and sand which serve the Indians as beds; lick the plates and cooking utensils; dirty the house; increase the household fauna with their fleas and other vermin thus contributing to create and unhealthy atmosphere in the home.

Problems of Intoxication.—Their dealings with the fish buyers, in whose stores are sold beer, mezcal and tequila, has turned them to the consumption of these drinks. The Seri drinks liquor in an uncontrolled

9:Malkin E-5 (1953-1955)1962 NU31 Seri NU31

462 desert plants or littoral fishlets from tide-pools or of the shellfish. Both men and women will [224] bring in an occasional rattler, although women [857] are more likely to do this because they spend more [883] time in the desert. Children of both sexes are engaged in the female occupations here, but adolescent boys already join in their fathers' hunts on land or sea.

342 Housing has undergone some changes. In the 184 desert or on Tiburon the Indians construct the kind of shelter they did in the recorded past, an ocotillo frame, bent over in the middle and covered up with dried plant debris and twigs from the desert, or with the sail cloth. But in Desemboque they have more substantial houses—of wattle and adobe, with flat roofs, rectangular or square, often with corrugated tin or drift planks and other debris piled up on top, or along the walls.

178 In the remainder of their material culture, not much has been left from years past although one must remember that from the very beginning of recorded Serian history it has been of a most [291] meager sort. Pelican robes, which some Seris ap- [412] parently still wore in 1930 are gone for good. 323 So are the stone tools. So is the pottery which had probably disappeared in Kroeber's time. The hu- [301] man hair necklace with rattlesnake rattles is also a thing of the past. The rattlesnake skin belts [291] McGee (1898:170) described and figured are probably all gone. I havn't seen or heard of any.

412 But what remains much as they had been in 285 1894 are the bone-awls. These are made of burros' carpals and the blossoming of basketry, owing to

[p. 8A]

10: Davis E-5 (1922-ca: 1939) 1965 NU31 Seri NU31

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Seri Indians

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123 the boat and took dinner. Afterward, we pulled out into the Gulf and skirted the coast, rowing for miles. We passed great red mountains with the sea beating against their rugged breasts, hollowing out deep caverns; then sandy bluffs with mountains receding, but the horizon was always notched with rugged, pinnacled desert ranges.

We landed for the night on a sandy point and made camp. After our supper two fires were built, Roberto's signal that he was on hand. [202] Also a white scarf was tied to a long pole as a signal of friendship. No answering signal appeared. Probably the people were on the opposite side of the Island.

At sunset the sea became calm as a pond and the mountains on Tiburon in the distance turned purple and lavender. The sea reflected all the sky and mountain colors like a mirror.

The next morning we got an early start and it required our united strength to push the boat down to the water as it was low tide. The beach was strewn with various shells and a lot of colored pumice stone which had drifted in from seventy-five miles north, where there are some pumice hills near the sea.

The nearest point of Tiburon was only one and a half miles distant, a short row across. The water was pure green, indicating a shallow sea. [361] We rounded the point and rowed into a bay and then to the head of the bay where there were a few huts called *Rancheria Tinajanita*, or Little Tanks. The water was so shallow in places we had to get out and push the boat a long way out and walk up a long muddy beach over shells and a sort of coral that bruised and cut our bare feet, so that we went as if walking on eggs.

342 The rancheria was built on the shore with no shade; each hut facing
361 the water. The huts were very crude---the frames of *carriso* reed and ocotillo, covered with coarse brush and blankets of dried seaweed. [35] Around the bottoms, or sides, of each hut were piled sea turtle shells three and a half feet high and two and a half feet wide. Over these were piled seaweed and brush, not fastened. Round about were turtle bones and shells, and sea shells, bones and anything that contained meat.

This was just a temporary camp of about eight huts.

123 We left this camp, raised the sail, which consisted of several
202 flour sacks sewed together, and lay in the bottom of the dug-out, while the one-eyed Mexican steered with a paddle. Before leaving, Ricardo left his sign---a sign agreed between him and the Seris. Since he and his family had been so kind to them, they would never harm him or kill his horses and cattle. He erected a stick with a rag to call attention, made a circle with his heel, and inside the circle made the tracks of his right bare foot and right hand.

123 At the bow we carried the white banner always to signify peace.
361 We crossed the bay to a sandy point and came upon another small

[text continues on p. 153]

123 handed to show their friendliness.

142 One was a young man with rather pleasant features, his braided
291 hair hanging below his shoulders. His name was Antonio Herrera. The
123 other was a wild-looking specimen called Ramon Blanco. His hair was a
[302] tangled mat with a short braid behind, suspicious black piercing eyes,
long sparse moustache and chin-beard hiding a broad cruel mouth. He
[411] wore the remnants of an old sweater, a short dirty kilt, or skirt,
nearly to his knees, a belt full of cartridges, mostly empty, and a
long knife in a rawhide scabbard.

123 The young man had been baptized and given a name by Roberto, who
[705] had acted as godfather or *patrona*, many years ago. He wore a hat,
[291] jacket, and pants of blue denim, and *guaraches*, or sandals of rawhide.

We shook hands all around and then they called and halloed in the brush and soon three women and a lot of children, wild and half-
[415] clothed, filed into camp. The women were tall, gaunt, unkempt, ragged
[482] and barefooted, paying us not the slightest notice. They were bearing
[422] on their heads large baskets filled with all their earthly posses-
[854] sions---cooking ollas, scraps of cloth, pieces of turtle meat, bone
[231] brads, hair brushes, and odds and ends. They carried, also, an infant or two wrapped in odd bits of rags. Several gaunt dogs followed in their wake.

342 In all, three families came trailing in, removed their household equipment from their heads and resumed their interrupted and primitive
[592] housekeeping. Each family occupied its apartment in the row of brush shelters, separated from each other only by brush partitions with a total lack of privacy. These shelters, always open to the sea, serve as shade from the fierce rays of the sun, and also as windbreaks, but
[361] are no protection from infrequent rains. They are occupied only for a brief period and then their nomadic tenants move on to fresh *cahuama*, or sea turtle range.

123 Soon, a third man arrived while we were near the huts, Manuel
[142] Encina. He was a man of sixty-five, gray hair and mustache, seamed features, and not evil looking. He was out of breath. He had gone for water to the same water hole where we had been yesterday, struck our tracks, had left his water cans and hurried back to warn his people. He was greatly relieved to find friends.

Since he had gone for water, inquiry revealed there had been no water in camp for two days, and six adults and one girl of thirteen and six children were thirsty. We gladly gave them one of our five-
[225] gallon cans of water and they were very grateful. They had caught a
[262] sea turtle the day before and gave us some turtle steaks which looked like beef or mutton.

312 As the camp was without water and we were running short, the young
492 man and Encina offered to get some. Each took a *palanca*, or short
123 shoulder pole with knotched ends, fitted empty five-gallon cans in

000 wear ceremonial feathers as did our western Indians. I saw no skin or
164 cutaneous disease, or evidence of tuberculosis or of trachoma---the curse of our Indians.

142 One boy-child of five years was a handsome child---fat, round,
302 sturdy, with roving great black eyes, large thick lips, a picture of
[241] perfect health. He was almost naked. His hair was done in a pigtail
[837] with a red string braided into it. His face like all the others was dirty, but he waded into the shallow water with a short spear and I saw him catch two crabs with his little harpoon. The water did not bother his face.

415 They had no plates or eating tools, except large deep clam shells,
412 cast up by the sea, which served as cups and dippers. Their long, keen
264 belt knives were used for cutting, carving or skinning, and always the
[237] fingers for eating. They gathered in a circle around an olla of seeds of long grass growing on the sea bottom prepared by winnowing, parching and grinding, and then cooked with turtle oil. Each one dipped his or her fingers into the olla and conveyed them to the mouth without losing a drop, and licked them off with great relish.

231 The dogs eat with the family. There were six or seven half-starved
264 ones. If someone picked up a piece of turtle flipper the dog often took the first lick at it, bit off a piece or licked it before it reached the owner's mouth. The dogs were not punished. They were just slapped to keep them out of the pots.

123 We had a great time that evening in Seriland. The young man played
534 his violin. This consisted of a hollow box cut out of a *palo verde*
[824] tree, and a piece of pine about sixteen inches long; terminating in a
[282] hollow where a single peg was fitted. The one string was twisted deer
[237] sinew, and the bridge was a small round clam shell at the far end. The
[533] bow was a small bent stick and some black horsehair. On the handle was a wad of rosin fastened underneath. By fingering this string a few weak squeaky notes were made, and this was the classical music of the Seris.

Manuel Encina seized his gourd rattle and began chanting. Herrera tapped a tin can and I beat on an inverted basket and the orchestra
535 was in full swing. A young girl, Rosa, dragged out a turtle shell and
123 standing on it began to dance. This dance consisted of stepping up and down quickly with each foot alternately, and this stamping, barefooted, emitted a hollow sound. Every once in a while I let out an
[126] Indian yell which pleased the Seris very much. For two hours they had a real swell time. We took one flashlight of the proceeding.

[342] Each family was in their hut, which afforded very slight shelter
[362] as they were only partially roofed over and the sides were broken
[354] down in places. The huts were all adjoining and each had a little
[361] campfire, which did not give much illumination, so the dancing was in semi-darkness.

[text continues on p. 163]

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Carrying firewood

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Seri basket maker - 1934

123 [361] [312] Clustered near this well were brush windbreaks joined together, divided by brush partitions all open on one side. Here were gathered several Seri families. There was no such thing as privacy or seclusion.

• [342] As soon as we stopped and unloaded we were immediately surrounded by a curious, half-starved mob of forty men, women and children, about fifteen to twenty children. All dirty, all ragged, all hungry. Some of them I recognized: others were new to me.

While preparing and eating our supper this motley crowd formed a circle about us and hungrily watched every mouthful. We gave them a little food and an orange all around, and they finally left. By that time we had also finished our bread and coffee and followed to the brush shelters.

535 123 [529] A dance was immediately started. A place was hollowed in the sand, a few short planks placed over it, and the dance was on. Music was furnished by men tapping on an inverted basket and chanting. Only one man danced at a time. Sand was thrown over the planks and the Indian danced a shuffle, scraping his bare feet on the boards. He held a staff in his right hand and danced to a song called in Spanish *El Toro*. Later on other dancers performed, then gave us the *venado* (deer) [171] dance, taught them by the Yaquis.

This dancer represents a timid deer, hopping up and down to the time of a rattle held in the right hand, and the chanting of the singers. The *venado* dancers stooped over frequently, turning first to one side and then the other to look behind. Manuel Encina was the *venado* and Chico Romero, a very large young Seri, acted the part of a coyote, crawling and jumping on all fours and barking and every once in a while biting the calf or thigh of the *venado*, then jumping back and barking. It was acted with great realism, and the onlookers, especially the children, enjoyed it immensely.

A wilder, more barbaric scene was probably seldom witnessed in America than this gathering of Seris on the shores of the Gulf of California, dancing the *venado*. The camp fire threw a flickering light over dark fierce faces with low foreheads and frowsy unkempt hair. [302] One man, Luis Torres, the head "ship carpenter" with a moustache and chin beard, his hair low-down framing his dark face, looked like a savage from the wilds of New Guinea. Another, Santo Blanco, a secondary chief below Juan Tomas, has a straggling moustache curling over cruel projecting lips which rarely smile, while his fierce black eyes peering through his black thatch of hair, have a perpetual scowl. The monotonous sing-song chant accompanied by the soft roar of the surf added an indescribable eeriness and weirdness to the dark night.

123 We soon turned in as it was then eleven o'clock, and we all fell asleep lulled by the waves of the sea.

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Seri Indians at home

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Seri Indians preparing their meal

10: Davis E-5 (1922-ca.1939) 1965 NU31 Seri NU31

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Santo Blanco and Edward H. Davis - this hombre gambled away his only shirt - Sonora - 1929

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Seri method of carrying infant

birds. As soon as the skin was off the breast was laid on top of the coals and roasted. The meat was red as raw beef, but it was free of fishy flavor and tasted excellent. The Indians ate pelican flesh till daylight.

We gave them a generous helping of flour in a pail and this with water from a canteen, Santo stirred vigorously with a stick and then kneaded the dough with his hands until it was of the right consistency. He rolled hunks of this into little balls of dough about the size of golf balls, which he laid on his blanket. The boys picked these up, patted them flat like pancakes, scraped away ashes and sand from the edge of the fire, placed their pancakes in the hollow, covered them with hot ashes and hot sand, and in about three minutes pulled them out all baked brown. They shook the ashes and sand from them, leaving them clean and ready to eat. I am telling this in detail to show how simple cooking can be done without a dutch-oven, frying pan, or cooking grease, far from civilization.

We were soon paddled across to their village on the shores of Kino Bay and the skins turned over to Mrs. Santo. The skins had been split down the back, leaving the breast unmarred. The wings and legs had already been removed, and she sewed the skins together with sinew recovered from the birds. The boys had secured an extra pelican making six, three to a side, then placed together and sewed lengthwise, making a robe three and a half feet wide by seven feet long.

Pegging out and drying a Pelican skin robe by a Seri Indian woman - 1936

BAND V

642 These people were apparently hunters, gatherers, and fishermen. It is said that they speared fish from the shore since they did not use *balsas*. They too apparently raided the ranches. Their warring nature has already been discussed; it resulted in the acquisition of few friends. However, several marriages between members of this band and members of subdivision 2 of Band III are said to have occurred.

BAND VI

The members of Band VI lived on San Esteban Island and were the most primitive of the tribe. They lived in huts made of driftwood and in caves and made extensive use of the *balsa*. Although they did not have the bow and arrow, they did become expert in the use of the spear. The people depended mainly on a seafood, iguana, and maguey diet.

621 628 578 Perhaps it was due to the confined living space on the small island with the accompanying lack of fresh water that relations between the four subdivisions were precarious and fights broke out frequently. The Seri today stress the fact that the members of this band were impetuous and unpredictable.

642 Their relations with the other bands were generally good however. Seri from Band III were free to visit San Esteban where they were well treated.

The San Esteban people seldom traveled to the mainland, and, since they spoke no Spanish, it is probable that they made no peaceful contact with non-Seri groups.

COLLAPSE OF THE BAND SYSTEM

642 628 578 648 Internal strife in the Seri tribe was probably a major factor in the establishment of the band system. External strife was a major factor in its downfall.

Reference has been made to the plundering, killings and rustling of cattle to which certain of the bands were dedicated. The concern of the Sonora government was aroused, and steps were taken to crush the rebellious groups. According to the present-day Seri, military action by army units and rancher outfits against the various bands resulted in the near-destruction of the whole tribe.[11]